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Go for seven

As they ponder the fate of the city, Miami commissioners should give serious consideration to a proposal that gives its three key constituent groups a fair shot at representation.

At the moment, commissioners have indicated a preference for five single-member districts, citing, among other factors, economics. As often is the case with redistricting initiatives, battle lines easily can be drawn around numbers. So let it be said that either number, five or seven, would be acceptable in most circumstances.

Indeed, commissioners' rejection of even-numbered districts was appropriate. Small legislative bodies, if even-numbered, create the potential for frequent stalemates. They need to be odd-numbered to create a tie-breaking vote.

Hispanic-community advocates understandably want to hold on to their majority. However, they seek to do so at the expense of the black community, long aggrieved and demanding representation where currently there is none. So the quest for a more-inclusive government must not result in a more-exclusive commission.

Although the five-member plan improves upon an awkwardly configured even-numbered commission, it doesn't go as far as it should. PULSE, a group of African-American residents, would like to see it go further and has filed a lawsuit toward that end.

PULSE makes a valid point. For decades there has been one, and only one, so-called "black seat" on the Miami Commission. That would not change under the five-district proposal. But within Miami's black community there

MIAMI DISTRICTS Why settle for five seats when two more would make the Miami City Commission represent the population better?

is enough political and ideological diversity to warrant two seats on the commission. Rather than confine black residents to one token commission seat, why not create an opportunity for two? Not doing so would be a demeaning imposi-

tion and would ill serve those who would be city leaders.

It already had been acknowledged that the six-district plan was palatable to each side. Three districts would have a Hispanic majority, two would have an African-American majority, and one likely would have had a non-Hispanic white majority.

Rejecting that proposal, commissioners also abandoned the idea of a strong mayor with a commission vote and veto. That formula would have guaranteed mischief — and perhaps a lawsuit.

A seven-member commission is likely to produce four Hispanic districts, two with black representatives, and, possibly, one with a non-Hispanic white representative.

To be sure, there indeed would be increased costs with a larger commission and a strong mayor. However, those costs need not get out of hand, because the commissioners themselves control the funds. The newly configured districts would be smaller, so the need for staffing should be downsized accordingly. Commissioners simply would need to exercise stringent fiscal responsibility to that end.

That said, the costs of two additional commissioners pale in comparison to the greater costs of a commission created from the same political and ethnic divisions that have plagued Miami for too long.